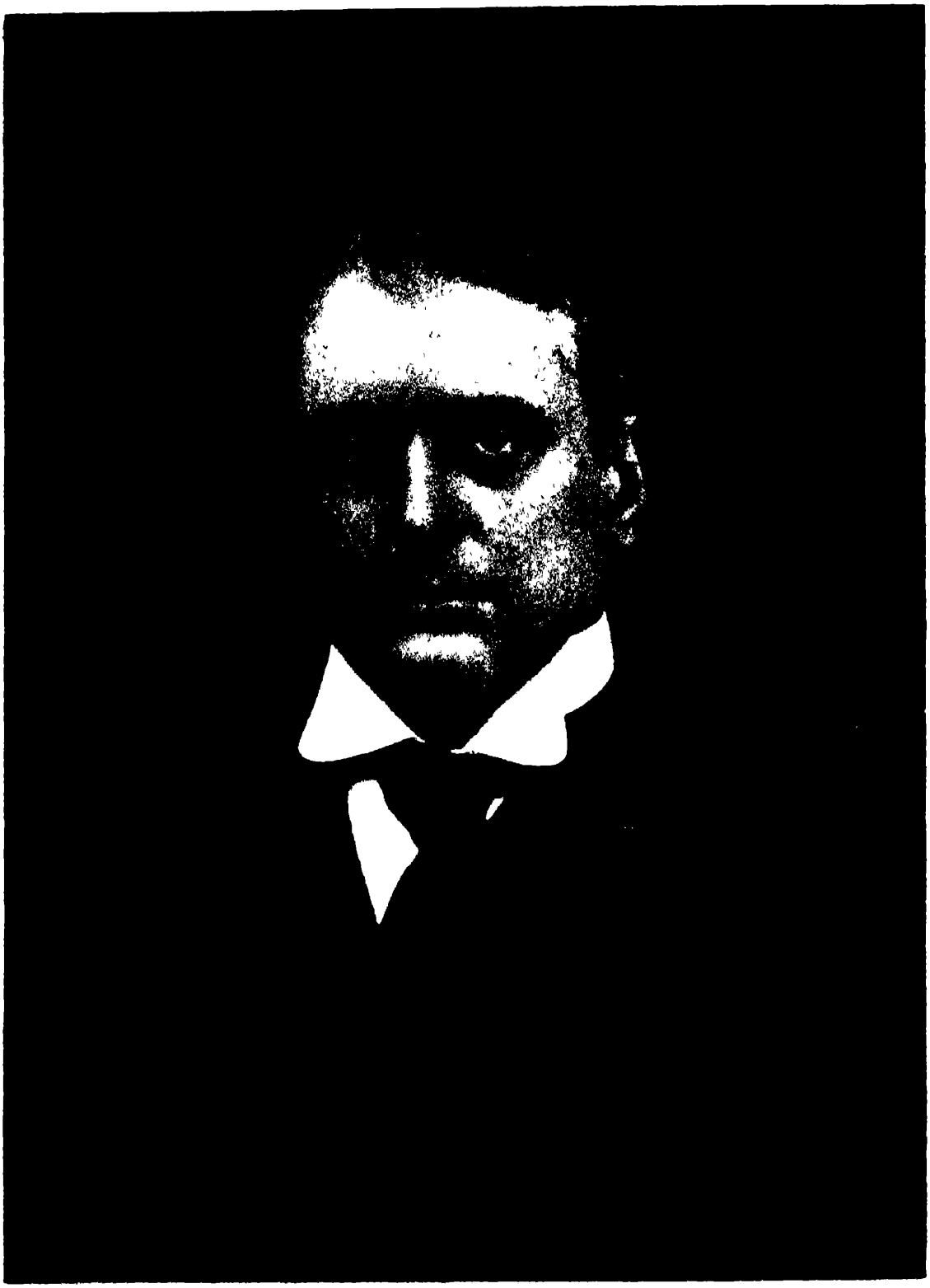

WALLACE

BURNS

STEVENSON

APPRECIATIONS

BY

LORD ROSEBERY

STIRLING
ENEAS MACKAY, 43 MURRAY PLACE

1912

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STATUE OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE.

National Wallace Monument, Stirling.

SIR WILLIAM WALLACE.

SIR WILLIAM WALLACE.

Stirling, September 18, 1897.

I WOULD gladly have exchanged toasts with either of the distinguished friends who have preceded me on the list, more especially since you, sir, have suddenly announced that I am expected not so much to propose a toast as to deliver a historical address. I confess that I have come here more or less prepared, or rather more or less unprepared, to propose a toast ; but if I had known that I was expected to deliver a historical address I should have claimed to exchange with at least one of my friends. I do not care which of the Balfours I had been chosen to fill the place of, whether it had been my noble friend on my left (Lord Balfour of Burleigh) or my right hon. friend on my right (Mr. J. B. Balfour) ; but I would rather have responded for any toast, or proposed any

toast, than have come here under the hypothesis that I was to deliver a historical address on so thorny a subject as Sir William Wallace.

I humbly submit that even to propose his memory is a very perilous task. There are, I think, two classes of my fellow-countrymen who would gladly be in the position in which I find myself. One is the class of minute archæological historians who would find a savage, an almost devilish delight in winnowing the true from the false in the legends that surround Sir William Wallace, and in distinguishing all that is legendary from the few golden facts which remain. But I think that you will agree with me that this would not be an occasion for such a discourse, and were it the occasion I am not the man.

After all, these points are not always of very first-rate importance. There is, however, one to which I will allude. It is sometimes, I believe, the subject of controversy, as to whether Wallace was a Scotsman at all. I regard that as a point of the most infinitesimal importance. It may be a subject of interest to many to know what is the birthplace or the district in which a person is brought up when

BATTLE OF STIRLING BRIDGE.

From [illegible] in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

that person has achieved a certain eminence. But there are greater figures than these, who embody and absorb a nation, and whom a nation has absorbed and embodied, but whose exact place of birth is a matter of no importance at all. We all know that Catherine the Second of Russia was a German Princess. We all know that the first Napoleon was of Italian origin, and born in Corsica. But I do not suppose there is anybody who has read a page of history who will deny that Catherine is one of the greatest of Russians, and that Napoleon is incomparably the greatest of Frenchmen.

Then there is another class who would have rejoiced to fill my place, but I am not sure either that they would have been the right persons—I mean the class of passionate and indiscriminating patriots, to whom everything true or false connected with the memory of a national hero is dear, and who, without the slightest effort or stress of deglutition, can swallow every legend and every tradition, that is associated with their favourite hero. Sir, those patriots would soar into heights to which I cannot aspire, and I venture to think that in so soaring they are not always

performing a wise or patriotic task; because I firmly believe that the stronger and the broader and the safer the base for your enthusiasm, the better it is for that enthusiasm; and that exaggeration, in matters of enthusiasm, is apt to lead to ridiclue and to reaction.

Sir, the authentic and received facts about Sir William Wallace are indeed extremely few. But this, in my judgment—and I hope you will accept that judgment—so far from diminishing the merit of that great man, seems to me a conclusive proof of his greatness. That with so small a substratum of historical event he should have left so great an impression upon his countrymen would in itself prove him to be one of the greatest of Scotsmen.

But the facts, whether few or many, are thunderbolts in themselves. The first is his own appearance—his magical, portentous, meteorical, providential appearance in the midst of the ruin, the suffering, and the disaster of his country. Fordun, the historian, describes it in words which are better than any I can use. "The same year," says Fordun, "William Wallace lifted up his head

from his den, as it were." He came, I say, as a portent or a meteor in the distracted condition of Scotland. The next salient fact in his career is this—the great battle of Stirling, which we commemorate to-day, in which he repulsed, with very inadequate means, the overwhelming forces of the English. Then there comes his appointment as Guardian or Protector of Scotland. Then there comes the battle of Falkirk, which might, and we believe would, have been a victory had not the desertion at a critical moment of his cavalry, led by the Scottish nobles who were associated with him, decided the fortune of the day. That is the only connection I can find for my noble friend Lord Balfour between Wallace and the House of Lords—and I think, under the circumstances, he was wise to avoid the subject. Then, disgusted with this treachery, Wallace resigns the guardianship of Scotland. The words in which Fordun recalls his resignation are so significant that I will venture once more to quote that historian :—

" But after the aforesaid victory which was vouchsafed to the enemy through the treachery of Scots, the aforesaid William Wallace,

perceiving by this and other strong proofs the glaring wickedness of the Comyns and their abettors, chose rather to serve with the crowd, than be set over them, to their ruin and the grievous wasting of the people; so not long after the battle of Falkirk at the Water of Forth, he of his own accord resigned the office or charge which he held of guardian."

Then he disappears into France for a few years. Then he comes back into Scotland, is captured, as some say, by treachery again, and is condemned to a cruel and shameful death in London, almost exactly eight years after the crowning victory of Stirling Bridge.

Now, gentlemen, these are the great and salient facts of Wallace's history, and they are so few that we may well wonder how so short a record has so powerfully impressed the imaginations of mankind. But, I think the causes are not very far to seek. The first I will mention is the least of them all. It is his biographer, Blind Harry. I believe that Blind Harry's record is now generally condemned as apocryphal and legendary, but this decision of historical criticism comes too late to overtake the impression made upon mankind. Dr. Moir, his most recent editor,

NATIONAL WALLACE MONUMENT, STIRLING.

says of his History that it has passed through more editions than any other Scottish book before the times of Burns and of Scott—that it was the book, next to the Bible, most frequently found in Scottish households. Burns tells us that it poured a Scottish prejudice into his veins "which will boil there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest." And we know in his famous lyric how that impression was reproduced. Well, no one can, I think, exaggerate the effect of such a leaven as this upon our national life. Nothing, however destructive the criticism may be, can now obliterate the impression that it has caused. A hero may die unknown and unhonoured without a biographer. Many a hero does. And therefore the memory of Wallace, great in itself as it may be, does owe a considerable debt to the imaginative and vivacious chronicler of his deeds.

Well, the next circumstance to which I would assign the impression left by Wallace is this, that the cause he headed was a great popular cause. The natural leaders of the people had either failed them, or betrayed them, or forsaken them, and so fierce were the internal divisions that raged between

the leaders of the people that one of them, Sir Richard Lundin, went over to Edward, justifying his defection by the declaration, "I will remain no longer of a party that is at variance with itself." The people turned to the new man with a new hope and a new expectation ; and as he was deserted by the aristocracy and the priesthood, he became essentially the man of the people.

But, Mr. Provost, there is a simpler reason than either of those which I have given why the memory of Wallace is so green among us. It is simply this that he was a great man. He was one of those men who appear with a single stamp of their foot to leave their impress upon history, as the footprint which startled Crusoe remains eternal on the field of romance. No man but a great man could have so roused and concentrated the people of Scotland ; no man but a great man could have been the centre round which the legends of Blind Harry clustered and remained. Why, sir, what does Lord Hailes say of Henry II. ? We may adopt the same words, I think, in speaking of Wallace. He says—but with a different intention—"I am afraid that no Scotsman can draw his character with impartiality." But

if any Scotsman can draw the character of Wallace with impartiality, it is our historian, John Hill Burton. John Hill Burton had many merits as a historian. He was not passionate, he was not enthusiastic, he was not even dramatic enough for most of us. But, then, when we cite him as a witness, he has this incalculable advantage that he is perfectly cold and dispassionate. What does he say of Wallace after examining minutely into his career? He says—"He was a man of vast political and military genius." Well, I suspect that we need look very little into the career of Wallace to justify that encomium. That he should have leaped into the supreme power in Scotland at a single bound, that he should have overthrown the overwhelming armaments of England with the very imperfect means at his disposal, that he should have constructed a Government, and in his brief administration have entered into relations with foreign States would seem to justify what Hill Burton says of him. But to my mind the greatest proof of Wallace's eminence and power is this, that in the amnesty of 1304, when Scotland lay almost prostrate at the feet of the invader, Wallace

was the sole exception to whom no mercy or quarter was to be shown—as if even Edward in the full swell of his power and supremacy felt that his empire was not safe so long as so dangerous, so potent, and so capable an enemy was at large.

Again, gentlemen, whatever his talents may have been, there is something greater in great men than their talents; for the most consummate talents in themselves will not make a great man. There is in them, besides their talent, their spirit, their character, that magnetic fluid, as it were, that enables them to influence vast bodies of their fellow-men, which makes them a binding and stimulating power outside the circle of their own personal fascination. That Wallace had this power we have abundant evidence. He was the first to rise and to face the oppressor. It was he who set the heather on fire. It was he who inspired the men and the events which followed. For, gentlemen, after all, what Wallace in his own person effected and achieved is as nothing to what he created and bequeathed behind him—the fixed resolve of undying patriotism, the passionate unquenchable determination of freedom, the men who were to emulate and

NATIONAL WALLACE MONUMENT, STIRLING.

imitate himself. Without him, in face of the formidable foe they had to face, the Scots might never have rallied for defence at all. Bruce might never have stood forth, and Bannockburn might not have been fought. Scotland might have become a remote and oppressed or neglected district, without a name or a history, or a friend; and the centuries of which we are so proud, centuries so full of energy and passion and dramatic history, might have passed silently and heedlessly over a dark and unknown province. Wallace was in truth the champion who stood forth and prevented this, who asserted Scotland as an independent country, who made, or remade, the Scots as a nation. It is for this that we Scotsmen must put him in the highest place. It is for this that we venerate his name, now that the dark and bloody memories of his time are memories, and nothing more. It is for this that we honour him when his foes are our nearest and dearest friends. And, gentlemen, can we not condense the truth about Wallace even more compactly than this?

Sir, there are junctures in the affairs of men when what is wanted is a man—not treasures,

not fleets, not legions, but a Man—the man of the moment, the man of the occasion, the man of destiny, whose spirit attracts and unites and inspires, whose capacity is congenial to the crisis, whose powers are equal to the convulsion—the child and the outcome of the storm. The type of the man is the same though you find it under different names and different forms in different ages. It is the same whether you call it Cæsar or Luther or Washington or Mirabeau or Cavour. The crisis is a travail, and the birth of the man ends or assuages it. We recognise in Wallace one of these men—a man of fate given to Scotland in the storms of the thirteenth century. It is that fact, the fact of his destiny and his fatefulness, that succeeding generations have instinctively recognised. It is that fact in reality that we are commemorating to-day.

Gentlemen, there are some who have doubts and difficulties with regard to celebrations of this kind. There are some who cast doubt on the wisdom of celebrating with enthusiasm men and events of so remote a period in our history. How, they think, can you kindle enthusiasm about men or events of six centuries ago? I shall not trouble this assembly

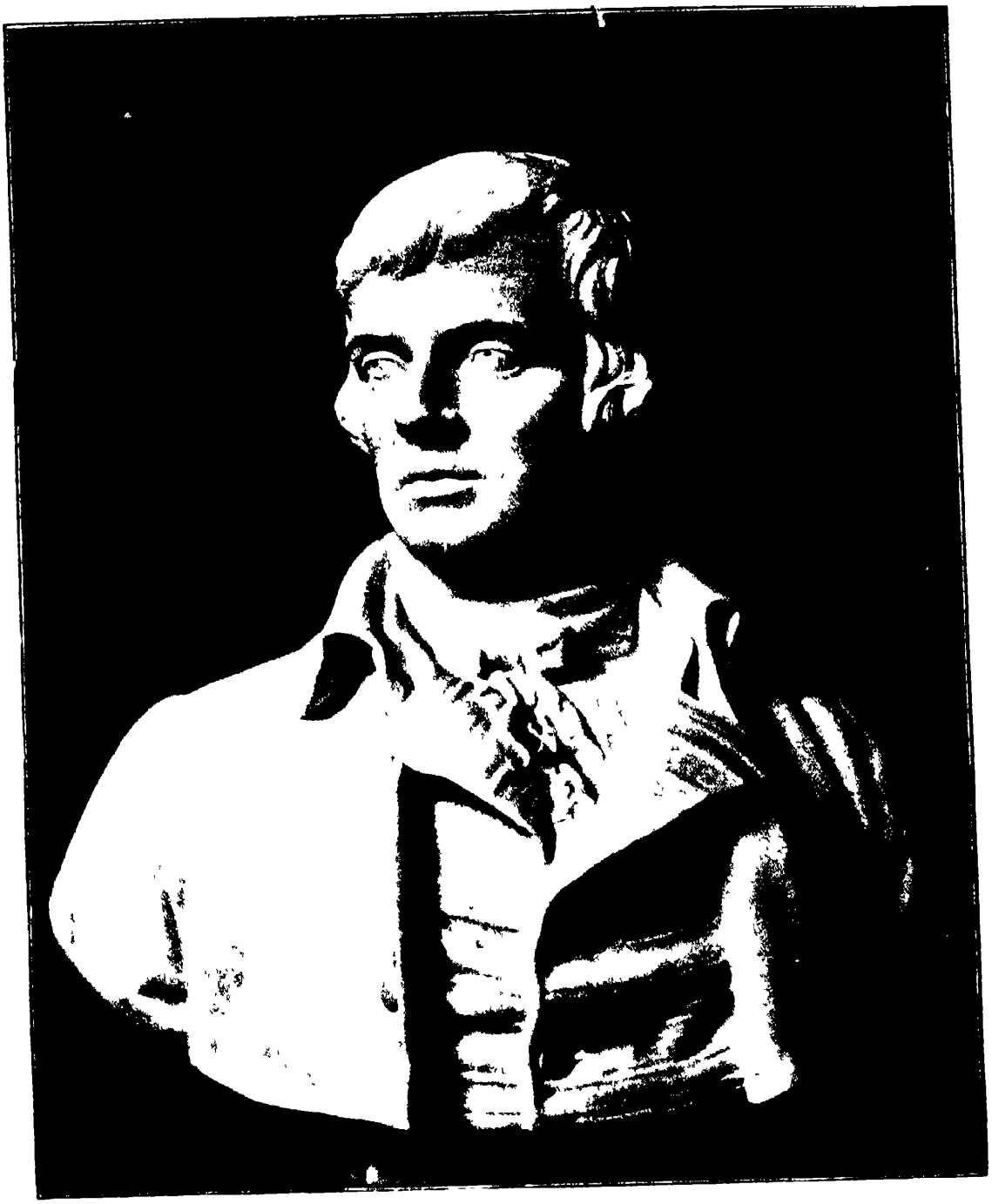
with answering such persons, except in the stanza which Burns wrote about the Solemn League and Covenant; of which there are two versions, which, with your permission, I will combine. Do you remember it?

> "The Solemn League and Covenant
> Cost Scotland blood, cost Scotland tears;
> But sacred Freedom, too, was theirs:
> If thou'rt a slave, indulge thy sneers."

But there is another class who urge, with more reason perhaps, that it is not timely or politic, or even friendly, to celebrate a victory in which the defeated foes were Englishmen. In my opinion it is no disparagement to our loyalty or our affection for England that we are celebrating the memory of the battle of Stirling and of Sir William Wallace. In the course of the long and bloody wars between the two countries, England has many victories to recall; but in the splendid record of her triumphs all over the world it is not worth while for her to celebrate the memory of such battles as Flodden or Dunbar. To us, however, the memory of this victory and of the man by whom it was gained does not represent the defeat of an English army, but

the dawn of our national existence and the assertion of our national independence. Let us all then, Englishmen and Scotsmen together, rejoice in this anniversary and in the memory of this hero, for he at Stirling made Scotland great; and if Scotland were not great, the empire of all the Britains would not stand where it does.

ROBERT BURNS.



BUST OF ROBERT BURNS.

National Wallace Monument, Stirling.

ROBERT BURNS.

Glasgow and Dumfries, July 21, 1896.

I.

I COME here as a loyal burgess of Dumfries to do honour to the greatest burgess of Dumfries. You, Mr. Provost, have laid upon me a great distinction, but a great burden. Your most illustrious burgess obtained privileges for his children in respect of his burgessship, but you impose on your youngest burgess an honour that might well break anybody's back—that of attempting to do justice in any shape or fashion to the hero of to-day's ceremony. But we citizens of Dumfries have a special claim to be considered on this day. We are surrounded by the choicest and the most sacred haunts of the poet. You have in this town the house in which he died, the "Globe," where we could have wished that some phonograph had then existed which could have communicated to us some of his

wise and witty, wayward talk. You have the street commemorated in M'Culloch's tragic anecdote, when Burns was shunned by his former friends, and you have the paths by the Nith which are associated with some of his greatest work. You have near you the room in which the whistle was contended for, and in which, if mere legend is to be trusted, the immortal Dr. Gregory was summoned to administer his first powders to the survivors of that memorable feast. You have the stackyard in which, lying on his back and contemplating—

> "Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,
> That lov'st to greet the early morn,"

he wrote the lines "To Mary in Heaven"—perhaps the most pathetic of his poems. You have near you the walk by the river where, in his transport, he passed his wife and children without seeing them, "his brow flushed and his eyes shining" with the lustre of "Tam o' Shanter." "I wish you had but seen him," said his wife; "he was in such ecstacy that the tears were happing down his cheeks." That is why we are in Dumfries to-day. We come

to honour Burns among these immortal haunts of his.

But it is not in Dumfries alone that he is commemorated to-day, for all Scotland will pay her tribute. And this, surely, is but right. Mankind owes him a general debt. But the debt of Scotland is special. For Burns exalted our race, he hallowed Scotland and the Scottish tongue. Before his time we had for a long period been scarcely recognised, we had been falling out of the recollection of the world. From the time of the union of the Crowns, and still more from the time of the legislative union, Scotland had lapsed into obscurity. Except for an occasional riot or a Jacobite rising, her existence was almost forgotten. She had, indeed, her Robertsons and her Humes writing history to general admiration, but no trace of Scottish authorship was discoverable in their works; indeed, every flavour of national idiom was carefully excluded. The Scottish dialect, as Burns called it, was in danger of perishing. Burns seemed at this juncture to start to his feet and re-assert Scotland's claim to national existence; his Scottish notes rang through the world, and he pre-

served the Scottish language for ever; for mankind will never allow to die that idiom in which his songs and poems are enshrined. That is a part of Scotland's debt to Burns.

But this is much more than a Scottish demonstration; it is a collection of representatives from all quarters of the globe to own a common allegiance and a common faith. It is not only Scotsmen honouring the greatest of Scotsmen—we stretch far beyond a kingdom or a race—we are rather a sort of poetical Mohammedans gathered at a sort of poetical Mecca.

And yet we are assembled in our high enthusiasm under circumstances which are somewhat paradoxical. For with all the appearance of joy, we celebrate not a festival, but a tragedy. It is not the sunrise, but the sunset that we commemorate. It is not the birth of a new power into the world, the subtle germ of a fame that is to survive and inspire the generations of men; but it is perhaps more fitting that we celebrate the end and not the beginning. For the coming of these figures is silent; it is their disappearance that we know. At this instant that I speak there may be born into the world the equal of a Newton

or a Cæsar, but half of us would be dead before he had revealed himself. Their death is different. It may be gloomy and disastrous; it may come at a moment of shame and neglect; but by that time the man has carved his name somewhere on the Temple of Fame. There are exceptions, of course; cases where the end comes before the slightest, or any but the slightest, recognition—Chatterton choking in his garret, hunger of body and soul all unsatisfied; Millet selling his pictures for a song; nay, Shakespeare himself. But, as a rule, death in the case of genius closes the first act of a public drama; criticism and analysis may then begin their unbiased work free from jealousy or friendship or personal consideration for the living. Then comes the third act, if third act there be.

No, it is a death, not a birth, that we celebrate. This day a century ago, in poverty, delirium, and distress, there was passing the soul of Robert Burns. To him death comes in clouds and darkness, the end of a long agony of body and soul; he is harassed with debt, his bodily constitution is ruined, his spirit is broken, his wife daily expecting her confinement. He has lost almost all that rendered

his life happy—much of friendship, credit, and esteem. Some score years before, one of the most charming of English writers, as he lay dying, was asked if his mind was at ease, and with his last breath Oliver Goldsmith owned that it was not. So it was with Robert Burns. His delirium dwelt on the horrors of a jail; he uttered curses on the tradesman who was pursuing him for debt. "What business," said he to his physician in a moment of consciousness, "what business has a physician to waste his time upon me? I am a poor pigeon not worth plucking. Alas! I have not feathers enough to carry me to my grave." For a year or more his health had been failing. He had a poet's body as well as a poet's mind; nervous, feverish, impressionable; and his constitution, which, if nursed and regulated, might have carried him to the limit of life, was unequal to the storm and stress of dissipation and a preying mind. In the previous autumn he had been seized with a rheumatic attack; his digestion had given way; he was sunk in melancholy and gloom. In his last April he wrote to his friend Thomson, "By Babel's streams I have sate and wept almost ever

since I saw you last. I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of sickness, and have counted time by the repercussions of pain! Rheumatism, cold, and fever, have formed, to me, a terrible combination, which makes me close my eyes in misery and open them without hope." It was sought to revive him by sea-bathing, and he went to stay at Browwell. There he remained three weeks, but was under no delusion as to his state. "Well, madame," he said to Mrs. Riddell on arriving, "have you any commands for the other world?" He sat that evening with his old friend, and spoke manfully of his approaching death, of the fate of his children, and his fame; sometimes indulging in bitter-sweet pleasantry, but never losing the consciousness of his condition. In three weeks he wearied of the fruitless hunt for health, and he returned home to die. He was only just in time. When he re-entered his home, on the 18th he could no longer stand; he was soon delirious; in three days he was dead. "On the fourth day," we are told, when his attendant held a cordial to his lips, he swallowed it eagerly, rose almost wholly up, spread out his hands, sprang forward nigh the whole

length of the bed, fell on his face, and expired."

I suppose there are many who can read the account of these last months with composure. They are more fortunate than I. There is nothing much more melancholy in all biography. The brilliant poet, the delight of all society, from the highest to the lowest, sits brooding in silence over the drama of his spent life; the early innocent home, the plough and the savour of fresh-turned earth; the silent communion with Nature and his own heart, the brief hour of splendour, the dark hour of neglect, the mad struggle for forgetfulness, the bitterness of vanished homage, the gnawing doubt of fame, the distressful future of his wife and children—an endless witch-dance of thought without clue or remedy, all perplexing, all soon to end while he is yet young, as men reckon youth; though none know so well as he that his youth is gone, his race is run, his message is delivered.

His death revived the flagging interest and pride that had been felt for him. As usual, men began to realise what they had lost when it was too late. When it was known that he

was dying the townspeople had shown anxiety and distress. They recalled his splendour and forgot his fall. One man was heard to ask, with a touch of quaint simplicity, "Who do you think will be our poet now?" The district set itself to prepare a public funeral for the poet who had died penniless among them. A vast concourse followed him to his grave. The awkward squad, as he had foreseen and deprecated, fired volleys over his coffin. The streets were lined with soldiers, among them one who, within sixteen years, was to be Prime Minister. And while the procession wended its gloomy way, as if no element of tragedy were to be wanting, his widow's hour of travail arrived, and she gave birth to the hapless child that had caused the father so much misgiving. In this place and on this day it all seems present to us—the house of anguish, the thronged churchyard, the weeping neighbours. We feel ourselves part of the mourning crowd. We hear those dropping volleys and that muffled drum; we bow our heads as the coffin passes, and acknowledge with tears the inevitable doom. Pass, heavy hearse, with thy weary freight of shattered hopes and exhausted frame;

pass, with thy simple pomp of fatherless bairns and sad moralising friends; pass, with the sting of death to the victory of the grave; pass, with the perishable, and leave us the eternal.

It is rare to be fortunate in life; it is infinitely rarer to be fortunate in death. "Happy in the occasion of his death," as Tacitus said of Agricola, is not a common epitaph. It is comparatively easy to know how to live, but it is beyond all option and choice to compass the more difficult art of knowing when and how to die. We can generally, by looking back, choose a moment in a man's life when he had been fortunate had he dropped down dead. And so the question arises naturally to-day, was Burns fortunate in his death—that death which we commemorate? There can, I fancy, be only one answer; it was well that he died when he did; it might even have been better for himself had he died a little earlier. The terrible letters that he wrote two years before to Mrs. Riddell and Mr. Cunningham betoken a spirit mortally wounded. In those last two years the cloud settles, never to be lifted. "My constitution and frame were *ab origine*

blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria which poisons my existence." He found perhaps some pleasure in the composition of his songs, some occasional relief in the society of boon companions; but the world was fading before him.

There is an awful expression in Scotland which one never hears without a pang—"So-and-so is *done*," meaning that he is physically worn out. Burns was "done." He was struggling on like a wounded deer to his death. He had often faced the end, and not unwillingly. "Can it be possible," he once wrote to Mrs. Dunlop, "that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence? When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those that know me, and the few who love me; when the cold, unconscious corse is resigned to the earth, to be the prey of reptiles, and become a trodden clod, shall I yet be warm in life, enjoying or enjoyed?" Surely that reads as if he foresaw this day and fain would be with us—as indeed he may be. Twelve years before he had faced death in a less morbid spirit:

" Why [he asked] am I loth to leave this earthly scene ?
Have I so found it full of pleasing charms ?
Some drops of joy, with draughts of ill between—
Some gleams of sunshine, 'mid renewing storms ?"

He had, perhaps, never enjoyed life so much as is supposed, though he had turned to it a brave, cheerful, unflinching face, and the last years had been years of misery. " God have mercy on me," he wrote years before the end, "a poor, damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool ! The sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonising sensibility, and bedlam passions." There was truth in this outburst. At any rate, his most devoted friends—and to be an admirer of Burns is to be his friend—may wish that he had not lived to write the letter to Mr. Clark, piteously pleading that a harmless toast may not be visited hardly upon him ; or that to Mrs. Riddell, beginning ; " I write from the regions of Hell, and the horrors of the damned ; " or to be harried by his official superiors as a political suspect ; shunned by his fashionable friends for the same reason ; wandering like a neglected ghost in Dumfries, avoided and ignored. " That's all over now, my young friend," he said, speaking of his reign in society,

"and werena my heart licht I wad dee." All this was in 1794. Had he died before then, it might have been happier for himself, and we should have lost some parts of his life which we would rather forget; but posterity could not have spared him; we could not have lost the exquisite songs which we owe to those years; but, above all, the supreme creed and comfort which he bequeathed to the world—

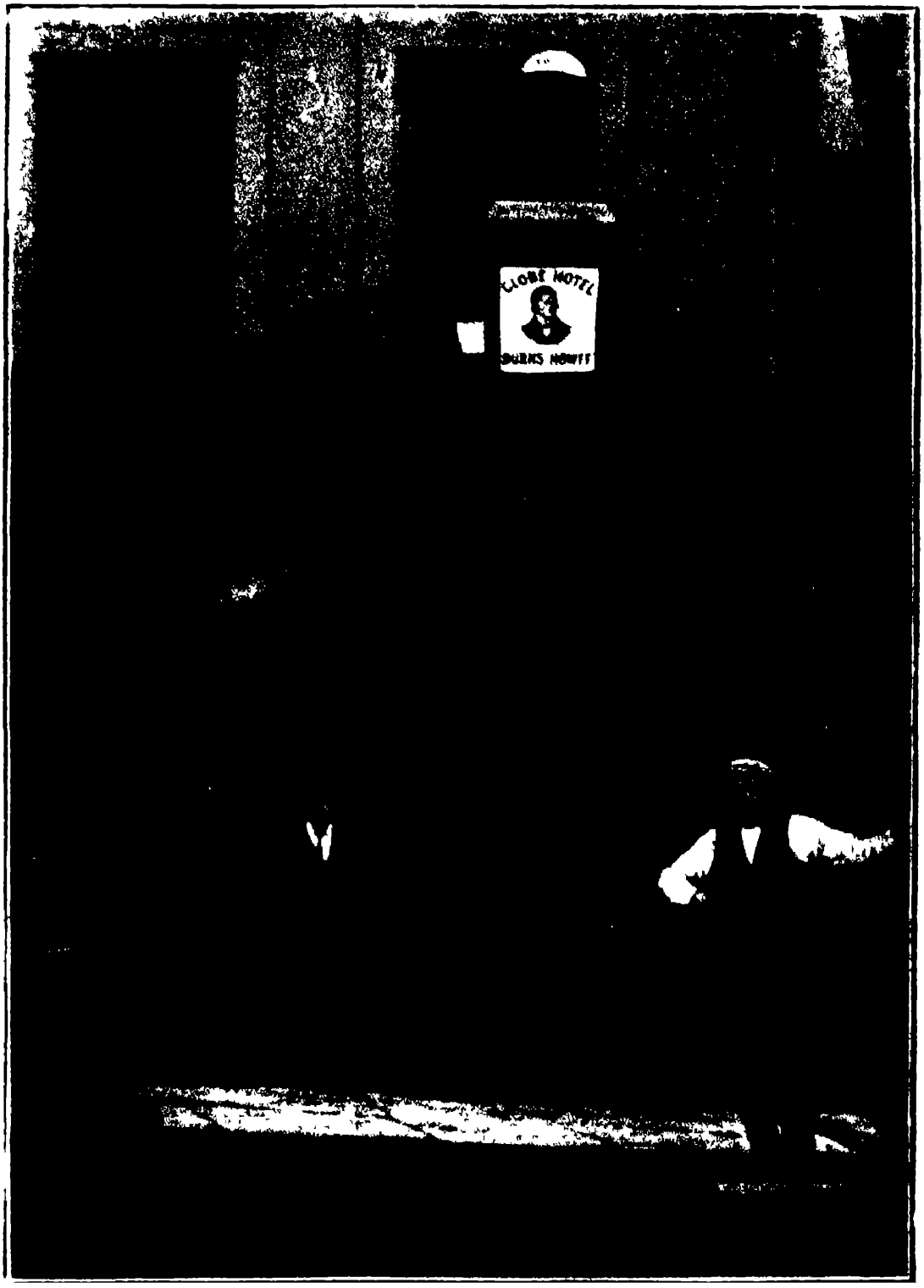
"A man's a man for a' that,"

would have remained undelivered.

One may, perhaps, go further and say that poets—or those whom the gods love—should die young. This is a hard saying, but it will not greatly affect the bills of mortality. And it applies only to poets of the first rank; while even here it has its exceptions, and illustrious exceptions they are. But surely the best poetry is produced before middle age, before the morning and its illusions have faded, before the heaviness of noon and the baleful cool of the evening. Few men, too, can bear the strain of a poet's temperament through many years. At any rate, we may feel sure of this, that Burns had produced his best, that he would never again have produced a "Tam o'

Shanter," or a "Cottar's Saturday Night," or a "Jolly Beggars;" and that long before his death, though he could still write lines affluent with tenderness and grace, "the hand of pain and sorrow and care," to use his own words, "had lain heavy upon" him.

And this leads to another point. To-day is not merely the melancholy anniversary of death, but the rich and incomparable fulfilment of prophecy. For this is the moment to which Burns looked when he said to his wife: "Don't be afraid; I'll be more respected a hundred years after I am dead than I am at present!" To-day the hundred years are completed, and we can judge of the prediction. On that point we must all be unanimous. Burns had honour in his lifetime, but his fame has rolled like a snowball since his death, and it rolls on. There is, indeed, no parallel to it in the world; it sets the calculations of compound interest at defiance. He is not merely the watchword of a nation that carries and implants Burns-worship all over the globe as birds carry seeds, but he has become the champion and patron saint of Democracy. He bears the banner of the essential quality of man. His birthday is



GLOBE TAVERN, DUMFRIES.

celebrated—137 years after its occurrence—more universally than that of any human being. He reigns over a greater dominion than any empire that the world has ever seen. Nor does the ardour of his devotees decrease. Ayr and Ellisland, Mauchline and Dumfries, are the shrines of countless pilgrims. Burns statues are a hardy annual. The production of Burns manuscripts was a lucrative branch of industry until it was checked by untimely intervention. The editions of Burns are as the sands of the sea. No canonised name in the calendar excites so blind and enthusiastic a worship. Whatever Burns may have contemplated in his prediction, whatever dream he may have fondled in the wildest moments of elation, must have fallen utterly short of the reality. And it is all spontaneous. There is no puff, no advertisement, no manipulation. Intellectual cosmetics of that kind are frail and fugitive; they rarely survive their subject; they would not have availed here. Nor was there any glamour attached to the poet; rather the reverse. He has stood by himself; he has grown by himself. It is himself and no other that we honour.

But what had Burns in his mind when he

made this prediction? It might be whimsically urged that he was conscious that the world had not yet seen his masterpiece, for the "Jolly Beggars" was not published till some time after his death. But that would not be sufficient, for he had probably forgotten its existence. Nor do I think he spoke at haphazard. What were perhaps present to his mind were the fickleness of his contemporaries towards him, his conviction of the essential splendour of his work, the consciousness that the incidents of his later years had unjustly obscured him, and that his true figure would be perceived as these fell away into forgetfulness or were measured at their true value. If so, he was right in his judgment, for his true life began with his death; with the body passed all that was gross and impure; the clear spirit stood revealed; and soared at once to its accepted place among the fixed stars, in the firmament of the rare immortals.

II.

WE are here to-day to celebrate Burns. What the direct connection of Burns with Glasgow may be I am not exactly sure; but, at any rate, I am confident of this, that in the great metropolis of the West there is a clear claim that we should celebrate the genius of Robert Burns. I have celebrated it already elsewhere. I cannot, perhaps, deny that the day has been a day of labour, but it has been a labour of love. It is, and it must be, a source of joy and pride to us to see our champion Scotsman receive the honour and admiration and affection of humanity; to see, as I have seen this morning, the long processions bringing homage and tribute to the conquering dead. But these have only been signs and symptoms of the world-wide passion of reverence and devotion. That generous and immortal soul pervades the universe to-day. In the humming city and in the crowd of man; in the backwood and in the swamp; where the sentinel paces the bleak frontier, and where the sailor smokes his

evening pipe ; and, above all, where the farmer and his men pursue their summer toil, whether under the Stars and Stripes or under the Union Jack—the thought and sympathy of men are directed to Robert Burns.

I have sometimes asked myself, if a roll-call of fame were read over at the beginning of every century, how many men of eminence would answer a second time to their names. But of our poet there is no doubt or question. The *adsum* of Burns rings out clear and unchallenged. There are few before him on the list, and we cannot now conceive a list without him. He towers high, and yet he lived in an age when the average was sublime.

It sometimes seems to me as if the whole eighteenth century was a constant preparation for, a constant working up to, the great drama of the revolution which closed it. The scenery is all complete when the time arrives—the dark volcanic country ; the hungry desperate people ; the firefly nobles ; the concentrated splendour of the Court—in the midst, in her place as heroine, the dazzling Queen. And during long previous years brooding nature had been producing not merely the immediate

actors, but figures worthy of the scene. What a glittering procession it is! We can only mark some of the principal figures. Burke leads the way by seniority; then come Fox and Goethe; Nelson and Mozart; Schiller, Pitt, and Burns; Wellington and Napoleon. And among these Titans, Burns is a conspicuous figure, the figure which appeals most of all to the imagination and affection of mankind. Napoleon looms larger to the imagination, but on the affection he has no hold. It is in the combination of the two powers that Burns is supreme.

What is his secret? We are always discussing him and endeavouring to find it out. Perhaps, like the latent virtue of some medicinal baths, it may never be satisfactorily explained. But, at any rate, let us discuss him again. That is, I presume, our object to-night. What pleasanter or more familiar occupation can there be for Scotsmen? But the Scotsmen who enjoy it have generally perhaps more time than I. Pardon, then, the imperfections of my speech, for I speak of a subject which no one can altogether compass, and which a busy man has perhaps no right to attempt.

The clue to Burns's extraordinary hold on mankind is possibly a complicated one ; it has, perhaps, many developments. If so, we have not time to consider it to-night. But I personally believe the causes are, like most great causes, simple ; though it might take long to point out all the ways in which they operate. The secret, as it seems to me, lies in two words—inspiration and sympathy. But if I wished to prove my contention, I should go on quoting from his poems all night, and his admirers would still declare that I had omitted the best passages. I know that profuse quotation is a familiar form of a Burns speech ; but I am afraid to begin lest I should not end, and I am sure that I should not satisfy. I must proceed, then, in a more summary way.

Now, there seem to me to be two great natural forces in British literature. I use the safe adjective of British, and your applause shows me that I was right to do so. I use it partly because hardly any of Burns's poetry is strictly English ; partly because he hated, and was perhaps the first to protest against, the use of the word English as including Scottish. Well, I say there are in that literature two

great forces of which the power seems sheer inspiration and nothing else—Shakespeare and Burns. This is not the place or the time to speak of that miracle called Shakespeare, but one must say a word of the miracle called Burns.

Try and reconstruct Burns as he was. A peasant, born in a cottage that no sanitary inspector in these days would tolerate for a moment; struggling with desperate effort against pauperism, almost in vain; snatching at scraps of learning in the intervals of toil, as it were with his teeth; a heavy, silent lad, proud of his ploughing. All of a sudden, without preface or warning, he breaks out into exquisite song, like a nightingale from the brushwood, and continues singing as sweetly—with nightingale pauses—till he dies. A nightingale sings because he cannot help it; he can only sing exquisitely because he knows no other. So it was with Burns. What is this but inspiration? One can no more measure or reason about it than measure or reason about Niagara.

And remember that the poetry is only a fragment of Burns. Amazing as it may seem, all contemporary testimony is unani-

mous that the man was far more wonderful than his works. "It will be the misfortune of Burns's reputation," writes an accomplished lady, who might well have judged him harshly, "in the records of literature, not only to future generations and foreign countries, but even with his native Scotland and a number of his contemporaries, that he has been regarded as a poet and nothing but a poet. . . . Poetry," she continues, "(I appeal to all who had the advantage of being personally acquainted with him) was actually not his *forte*, . . . None certainly ever outshone Burns in the charms—the sorcery I would almost call it—of fascinating conversation, the spontaneous eloquence of social argument, or the unstudied poignancy of brilliant repartee." And she goes on to describe the almost superhuman fascination of his voice and of his eyes, those balls of black fire which electrified all on whom they rested.

It seems strange to be told that it would be an injustice to judge Burns by his poetry alone; but as to the magnetism of his presence and conversation there is only one verdict. "No man's conversation ever carried me so com-

pletely off my feet," said the Duchess of Gordon—the friend of Pitt and of the London wits, the queen of Scottish society. Dugald Stewart says that "all faculties of Burns's mind were, so far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities." And of his prose compositions the same severe judge speaks thus: "Their great and various excellencies render some of them scarcely less objects of wonder than his poetical performances. The late Dr. Robertson used to say that, considering his education, the former seemed to him the more extraordinary of the two." "I think Burns," said Principal Robertson to a friend, "was one of the most extraordinary men I ever met with. His poetry surprised me very much, his prose surprised me still more, and his conversation surprised me more than both his poetry and prose." We are told, too, that "he felt a strong call towards oratory, and all who heard him

speak—and some of them were excellent judges—admitted his wonderful quickness of apprehension and readiness of eloquence." All this seems to me marvellous. It surely ratifies the claim of inspiration without the necessity of quoting a line of his poetry.

I pass, then, to his sympathy. If his talents were universal, his sympathy was not less so. His tenderness was not a mere selfish tenderness for his own family, for he loved all mankind except the cruel and the base. Nay, we may go further, and say that he placed all creation, especially the suffering and the despised part of it, under his protection. The oppressor in every shape, even in the comparatively innocent embodiment of the factor and the sportsman, he regarded with direct and personal hostility. But above all he saw the charm of the home; he recognised it as the basis of all society, he honoured it in its humblest form, for he knew, as few know, how unpretentiously, but how sincerely, the family in the cottage is welded by mutual love and esteem. "I recollect once," said Dugald Stewart, speaking of Burns, "he told me, when I was admiring a distant prospect in one of our morning walks, that the sight of so

many smoky cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and the worth which they contained." He dwells repeatedly on the primary sacredness of the home and the family, the responsibility of fatherhood and marriage. "Have not I," he once wrote to Lord Mar, "a more precious stake in my country's welfare than the richest dukedom in it? I have a large family of children, and the prospect of many more." The lines in which he tells his faith are not less memorable than the stately stanzas in which Gray sings the "short and simple annals of the poor." I must quote them again, often quoted as they are :

> "To make a happy fireside clime
> To weans and wife,
> That's the true pathos and sublime
> Of human life."

His verses, then, go straight to the heart of every home ; they appeal to every father and mother. But that is only the beginning, perhaps the foundation, of his sympathy. There is something for everybody in Burns. He has a heart even for vermin ; he has pity

even for the arch-enemy of mankind. And his universality makes his poems a treasure-house in which all may find what they want. Every wayfarer in the journey of life may pluck strength and courage from it as he passes. The sore, the weary, the wounded, will all find something to heal and soothe. For this great master is the universal Samaritan. Where the priest and the Levite may have passed by in vain, this eternal heart will still afford a resource. But he is not only for the poor in spirit. The friend, the lover, the patriot, will all find their choicest refreshment in Burns. His touch is everywhere, and it is everywhere the touch of genius. Nothing comes amiss to him. What was said of the debating power of his eminent contemporary, Dundas, may be said of his poetry: "He went out in all weathers." And it may be added that all weathers suited him; that he always brought back something precious, something we cherish, something that cannot die.

He is, then, I think, the universal friend in an unique sense. But he was, poetically speaking, the special friend of Scotland, in a sense which recalls a profound remark of

another eminent Scotsman, I mean Fletcher of Saltoun. In an account of a conversation between Lord Cromarty, Sir Edward Seymour, and Sir Christopher Musgrave, Fletcher writes: "I said I knew a very wise man, so much of Sir Christopher's sentiment that he believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation." This may be rudely paraphrased, that it is more important to make the songs of a nation than to frame its laws, and this, again, may be interpreted that in former days, at any rate in the days of Fletcher, and to the days of Burns, it is the familiar songs of a people that mould their thoughts, their manners, and their morals. If this be true, can we exaggerate the debt that we Scotsmen owe to Burns? He has bequeathed to his country the most exquisite casket of songs in the world; primarily to his country, and others cannot be denied their share. I will give only one example, but that is a signal one. From distant Roumania the Queen of that country wrote to Dumfries to-day that she has no copy of Burns with her, but that she knows his songs by heart.

We must remember that there is more than this to be said. Many of Burns's songs were already in existence in the lips and minds of the people—rough and coarse and obscene. Our benefactor takes them, and with a touch of inspired alchemy transmutes them and leaves them pure gold. He loved the old catches and the old tunes, and into these gracious moulds he poured his exquisite gifts of thought and expression. But for him, those ancient airs, often wedded to words which no decent man could recite, would have perished from that corruption if not from neglect. He rescued them for us by his songs, and in doing so he hallowed the life and sweetened the breath of Scotland.

I have also used the words patriot and lover. These draw me to different lines of thought. The word "patriot" leads me to the political side of Burns. There is no doubt that he was suspected of being a politician; and he is even said to have sometimes wished to enter Parliament. That was perhaps an excusable aberration, and my old friend Professor Masson has, I think, surmised that had he lived he might have been a great Liberal pressman. My frail thought shall not dally with such surmise,

but it conducts as naturally to the subject of Burns's politics. From his sympathy for his own class, from his indignation against nobles like the Duke of Queensberry, and from the toasts that cost him so dear, it might be considered easy to infer his political opinions. But Burns should not be claimed for any party. A poet, be it remembered, is never a politician, and a politician is never a poet—that is to say, a politician is never so fortunate as to be a poet, and a poet is so fortunate as never to be a politician. I do not say that the line of demarcation is never passed—a politician may have risen for a moment, or a poet may have descended; but where there is any confusion between the two callings, it is generally because the poet thinks he discerns, or the politician think he needs something higher than politics. Burns's politics were entirely governed by his imagination. He was at once a Jacobite and a Jacobin. He had the sad sympathy which most of us have felt for the hapless house of Stewart, without the least wish to be governed by it. He had much the same sort of abstract sympathy with the French Revolution, when it was setting all Europe to rights; but he was

prepared to lay down his life to prevent its putting this island to rights. And then came his official superiors of the Excise, who, notwithstanding Mr. Pitt's admiration of his poetry, snuffed out his politics without remorse.

The name of Pitt leads me to add that Burns had some sort of relation with three Prime Ministers. Colonel Jenkinson, of the Cinque Ports Fencible Cavalry—afterwards Minister for fifteen years under the title of Liverpool—was on duty at Burns's funeral, though we are told—the good man—that he disapproved of the poet, and declined to make his acquaintance. Pitt, again, passed on Burns one of his rare and competent literary judgments, so eulogistic, indeed, that one wonders that a powerful Minister could have allowed one whom he admired so much to exist on an exciseman's pay when well, and an exciseman's half-pay when dying. And from Addington, another Prime Minister, Burns elicited a sonnet, which, in the Academy of Lagado, would surely have been held a signal triumph of the art of extracting sunshine from cucumbers.

So much for politics in the party sense. "A

man's a man for a' that" is not politics—it is the assertion of the rights of humanity in a sense far wider than politics. It erects all mankind; it is the charter of its self-respect. It binds, it heals, it revives, it invigorates; it sets the bruised and broken on their legs, it refreshes the stricken soul, it is the salve and tonic of character; it cannot be narrowed into politics. Burns's politics are indeed nothing but the occasional overflow of his human sympathy into past history and current events.

And now, having discussed the two trains of thought suggested by the words "friend" and "patriot," I come to the more dangerous word, "lover." There is an eternal controversy, which, it appears, no didactic oil will ever assuage, as to Burns's private life and morality. Some maintain that these have nothing to do with his poems; some maintain that his life must be read into his works, and here again some think that his life damns his poems, while others aver that his poems cannot be fully appreciated without his life. Another school thinks that his vices have been exaggerated, while their opponents scarcely think such exaggeration possible. It is impossible to

avoid taking a side. I walk on the ashes, knowing the fire beneath, and unable to avoid it, for the topic is inevitable. I must confess myself, then, one of those who think that the life of Burns doubles the interest of his poems, and I doubt whether the failings of his life have been much exaggerated, for contemporary testimony on that point is strong ; though a high authority, Mr. Wallace, has recently taken the other side with much power and point.

But the life of Burns, which I love to read with his poems, does not consist in his vices ; they lie outside it. It is a life of work, and truth and tenderness. And though, like all lives, it has its light and shade, remember that we know it all, the worst as well as the best. His was a soul bathed in crystal, he hurried to avow everything. There was no reticence in him. The only obscure passage in his life is the love passage with Highland Mary, and as to that he was silent not from shame, but because it was a sealed and sacred episode. " What a flattering idea," he once wrote, " is a world to come ! There shall I with speechless agony of rapture again recognise my lost, my ever dear Mary ! whose bosom was fraught

with truth, honour, constancy, and love." He had, as the French say, the defects of his qualities. His imagination was a supreme and celestial gift. But his imagination often led him wrong, and never more than with women. The chivalry that made Don Quixote see the heroic in all the common events of life made Burns (as his brother tells us) see a goddess in every girl that he approached. Hence many love affairs, and some guilty ones; but even these must be judged with reference to time and circumstance. This much is certain, that had he been devoid of genius they would not have attracted attention. It is Burns's pedestal that affords a target. And why, one may ask, is not the same measure meted out to Burns as to others? The illegitimate children of great captains and statesmen and princes are treated as historical and ornamental incidents. They strut the scene of Shakespeare, and ruff it with the best. It is for the illegitimate children of Burns, though he and his wife cherished them as if born in wedlock, that the vials of wrath are reserved. Take two brilliant figures, both descended from the Stewarts, who were alive during Burns's life. We occupy ourselves

endlessly and severely with the offences of Burns. We heave an elegant sigh over the kindred frailties of Charles James Fox and Charles Edward Stewart.

Again, it is quite clear that, though exceptionally sober in his earlier years, he drank too much in later life. But this, it must be remembered, was but an occasional condescendence to the vice and habit of the age. The gentry who pressed him to their houses, and who were all convivial, have much to answer for. His admirers who thronged to see him, and who could only conveniently sit with him in a tavern, are also responsible for this habit, so perilously attractive to men of genius. From the decorous Addison and the brilliant Bolingbroke onward, the eighteenth century records hard drinking as the common incident of intellectual eminence. To a man who had shone supreme in the most glowing society, and who was now an exciseman in a country town, with a home that cannot have been very exhilarating, and with a nervous system highly strung, the temptation of the warm tavern, and the admiring circle there, may well have been almost irresistible. Some attempt to say that his intemperance was ex-

aggerated. I neither affirm nor deny. It was not as a sot he drank ; that no one insinuated ; if he succumbed it was to goodfellowship.

Remember, I do not seek to palliate or excuse, and, indeed, none will be turned to dissipation by Burns's example ; he paid too dearly for it. But I will say this, that it all seems infinitely little, infinitely remote. Why do we strain, at this distance, to discern this dim spot on the poet's mantle ? Shakespeare and Ben Jonson took their cool tankard at the Mermaid ; we cannot afford, in the strictest view of literary responsibility, to quarrel with them for that. When we consider Pitt and Goethe we do not concentrate our vision on Pitt's bottles of Port or Goethe's bottles of Moselle. Then why, we ask, is there such a chasm between the Mermaid and the Globe, and why are the vintages of Wimbledon and Weimar so much more innocent than the simple punch-bowl of Inveraray marble and its contents ?

I should like to go a step further, and affirm that we have something to be grateful for even in the weaknesses of men like Burns. Mankind is helped in its progress almost as much by the study of imperfection as by the

contemplation of perfection. Had we nothing before us in our futile and halting lives but saints and the ideal we might well fail altogether. We grope blindly along the catacombs of the world, we climb the dark ladder of life, we feel our way to futurity, but we can scarcely see an inch around or before us. We stumble and falter and fall, our hands and knees are bruised sore, and we look up for light and guidance. Could we see nothing but distant unapproachable impeccability, we might well sink prostrate in the hopelessness of emulation and the weariness of despair. Is it not then, when all seems blank and lightless and lifeless, when strength and courage flag, and when perfection seems as remote as a star, is it not then that imperfection helps us? When we see that the greatest and choicest images of God have had their weaknesses like ours, their temptations, their hours of darkness, their bloody sweat, are we not encouraged by their lapses and catastrophes to find energy for one more effort, one more struggle? Where they failed we feel it a less dishonour to fail; their errors and sorrows make, as it were, an easier ascent from infinite imperfection to infinite per-

fection. Man after all is not ripened by virtue alone. Were it so this world were a paradise of angels. No! Like the growth of the earth, he is the fruit of all the seasons; the accident of a thousand accidents, a living mystery, moving through the seen to the unseen. He is sown in dishonour; he is matured under all the varities of heat and cold; in mist and wrath, in snow and vapours, in the melancholy of autumn, in the torpor of winter, as well as in the rapture and fragrance of summer, or the balmy affluence of the spring—its breath, its sunshine, its dew. And at the end he is reaped—the product, not of one climate, but of all; not of good alone, but of evil; not of joy alone, but of sorrow—perhaps mellowed and ripened, perhaps stricken and withered and sour. How, then, shall we judge any one? How, at any rate, shall we judge a giant, great in gifts and great in temptation; great in strength and great in weakness? Let us glory in his strength and be comforted in his weakness. And when we thank heaven for the inestimable gift of Burns, we do not need to remember wherein he was imperfect, we cannot bring ourselves to regret that he was made of the same clay as ourselves.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

PORTRAIT OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

Edinburgh, December 10, 1898.

IN taking this prominent position this afternoon, I feel to be somewhat of an impostor. I never knew or saw Robert Louis Stevenson face to face, and I am speaking among numbers here who knew him from childhood almost till he left this country for good. His mother is here. How, then, can I, in her presence and in the presence of those friends who knew him so well, pretend to take a prominent part on this occasion? My part was a perfectly simple one. I wrote to the papers a genuine inquiry. I could not but believe that in this age of memorials and testimonials no stone or cairn had been put up to the memory of Robert Louis Stevenson. I should have been confident that such a memorial had been put up but for one trifling, though capital, circumstance—I had never

been asked for a subscription ; and therefore I came to the conclusion that there was grave doubts as to whether any such movement had taken place. Well, my inquiry has, I suppose, landed me in this chair. But I have been trying to make out some sort of relation to the genius we commemorate to-day which should entitle me to be in this place. Somewhere or other Robert Louis Stevenson has said that the two places which appealed most powerfully to his imagination are Bearford Bridge and the Hawes Inn, at Queensferry. Now, it so chances that close to both those places I have pitched my tent, or had my tent pitched for me. Bearford Bridge you probably don't all know. It is a place where Keats composed part of his "Endymion;" where Nelson bade farewell to Lady Hamilton. It is near the spot where Talleyrand took refuge from the Revolution ; where Miss Burney first saw her husband, and where she spent the best years of her life. The Hawes Inn, at Queensferry, you probably know much better. I do not mean in the character of *bona fide* travellers, but rather as pilgrims to a sacred haunt ; for it is there that the genius of Sir Walter Scott and the

genius of his successor first grasped each other by the hand; for it is in the Hawes Inn, simple structure as it is, that the first act of the "Antiquary" and the first act of "Kidnapped" are laid. It is a solace to me to think that Sir Walter Scott certainly, and Robert Louis Stevenson I think certainly too, never saw that inn as it is now, overstridden and overidden by that monster of utility the Forth Bridge, which has added so immensely to the convenience and detracted so materially from the romance of that locality. Well, I have another claim to be here, but it is a claim that I have only in common with you all, and that is of being an ardent admirer of Robert Louis Stevenson and his work.

To-day is not the moment—we have not the time, and it would require a literary capacity to which I make no pretence—to-day is not the opportunity to enter into any review of the works of Stevenson. But there are two or three points to which, as an outside reader, like yourselves, I must call your attention before I sit down. The first is the inimitable quality of his style. Now, the word style and stylist are apt perhaps in those days to raise a momentary prejudice

as suggesting a style of writing which aims at words and phrases rather than at ideas; but Stevenson's style was not this. Stevenson's style was the man himself, and it was even more, perhaps, than the man himself. I copied out this morning for you the account he gives somewhere of the slow and painful steps by which he acquired the style we know so well. He says: "I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read and one to write in. Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it, and tried again, and was again unsuccessful, and always unsuccessful. But at least in these vain bouts I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction, and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Montaigne, to Beaudelaire, and Oberman." And to these he adds afterwards, in a later passage, Ruskin, Browning, Morris, Keats, Swinburne, Chaucer, Webster,

Congreve, and Thackeray; and he sums it all by saying "that, like it or not, is the way to write." If a dullard was to pursue that practice which Stevenson enjoins, he would at the end of it be probably only as at the beginning a "sedulous ape." But with Stevenson there was the genius to mould what he had acquired by this painful practice. Mr. Fox said of Mr. Pitt that he himself (Mr. Fox) had always a command of words, but that Mr. Pitt had always the command of the right words, and that is a quality which strikes us so in the style of Stevenson. I do not know whether his method was easy or laborious. I strongly suspect it may have been laborious, but, whichever it was, he never was satisfied with any word which did not fully embody the idea that he had in his mind, and therefore you have in his style something suggestive, something musical, something pregnant, a splendid vehicle for whatever he had to say.

He was not satisfied with style; he infused into his style a spirit which, for want of a better word, I can only call a spirit of irony of the most exquisite kind. He, as you know, adopted a style of diction which reminds us sometimes more of Addison's *Spectator* or

Steele's *Tatler* than of the easier and more emotional language of these later days. But as he put into these dignified sentences this spirit which, for want of a better word, I must call irony, he relieved what otherwise might have been heavy. Now, I think you will all recognise what I mean when I speak of this spirit of irony. You will find it in, I think, every page of his works. I do not mean that of the savage and gruesome parable which has added a household word to the English language, and which is called "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" or "Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jekyll;" but I will take one instance from one of the works of his highest imagination, "The New Arabian Nights." He takes Rudolf out of "The Mysteries of Paris" and puts him down in London as a plump and respectable Prince of Bohemia, bent on adventure, but comfortably situated, hovering always between the sublime and the ridiculous, till the author at last makes up his mind for the ridiculous, and settles him down in a cigar divan. But no one can read the account of Florizel, Prince of Bohemia, without recognising that essential quality of irony which makes Stevenson's style so potent. In some of his books he

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON MEMORIAL.

[illegible]

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"Give us grace and strength to forbear and to persevere. Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Spare to speak and spare to speed; and grant that in our daily intercourse we may be mindful of the rights and feelings of one another."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Born at 17 Howard Place, Edinburgh, November XIII MDCCCL, died at Vailima, Island of Upolu, Samoa, December III MDCCCXCIV. This memorial is erected in his honour by readers in all quarters of the world who admire him as a master of English and Scottish letters, and to whom his constancy under infirmity and suffering, and his spirit of truth, courage, and love, have endeared his name.

I to the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live, and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

Augustus Saint Gaudens

[illegible]

develops an even more bitter power of the same kind. In "The Dynamiters" you will find that in a form sometimes in which neither Swift nor Thackeray could have excelled. The picture of the scheming dynamiter, full of the high impulse of his mission and constantly baffled by the cruel fate of circumstances in his efforts for an exhaustive explosion, is perhaps one of the most powerful instances of sardonic treatment to be met with in the whole history of English literature.

Well, I cannot take instances of satire, because I should have to refer you to every page, but I will take the third point on which I wish to dwell for one moment this afternoon —it is the dramatic, realistic power of imagination, which, as I conceive, added to the style and the spirit of lambent irony which pervades Stevenson's works, is what has raised him a head and shoulders above his fellows. Now I suppose at this moment we can all conjure to our minds some scene in one of his books which strikes us as more powerful and more imaginative than the rest. There is a scene in "The Master of Ballantrae" which, powerful as it is, has never, I confess, been a favourite of mine,

because the story is so unutterly repulsive from the beginning to the end—the conflict of a scoundrel against a maniac narrated by a coward. But in the "The Master of Ballantrae" there is a scene which we see before us as vividly as I see your faces now, where the old steward comes out with a silver candle in each hand glaring into the still and silent night, ushering the brothers to their death struggle like a landlord handing illustrious guests to their apartments. He walks through the night, and he holds the lights while they fight, and you next see the dead body, or seemingly dead body, of the elder lying with the wax candles flickering on each side in the silent night, and then again the steward returns, the body is gone, one wax candle has fallen down, the other is upright, still flickering over the bloodshed. Can you not all see it as you read it in the page of Stevenson? To me there seems nothing more vivid in all history. Take another scene. You remember the defence of the little pavilion on the links, the old cowardly caitiff shrinking from the result of his crimes, the clinging daughter, the brave brute who defends and despises the criminal, the un-

welcome guest who chronicles it, and in the midst of that strange story of defence you remember the little Italian hat that comes skimming across the scene slowly—as vivid a touch as the footprints in "Robinson Crusoe." Let me give you one more instance, and only one more. It is in the masterpiece to applaud which old age and youth combine —I mean, of course, "Treasure Island." In "Treasure Island" there are two walking-sticks—sticks that I think that those who have read "Treasure Island" will never forget. There is the stick of the old blind man Pugh that comes rapping, rapping through the darkness like the rattle of the snake, a sure indication of the coming curse, and there is the crutch of Long John, at once a weapon and a defence, which I think will live in our memory as long as any incident.

It is a folly, it is a presumption, to try and animadvert even on the works of this great genius in so cursory a manner, but the greatness of his genius is urged against any proposal to commmemorate it at this moment. We are told by those who are always critics and always objectors—and nothing in this world was ever done by critics and objectors

—we are told by them that, after all, the works of Robert Louis Stevenson are his best memorials. In one sense that is undoubtedly true. No man of ancient or modern times since the beginning of the world has ever left behind him so splendid a collection of his works as has Robert Louis Stevenson—I mean not merely of what they contain, but the outward and visible form of them. But this objection, if it is worth anything, means this—that testimonials are to be confined to those who have done nothing to make themselves remembered. I know very well that the age is marching at such a pace in this direction that it will be a source of pride soon to man, woman, or child to say that they have never received a testimonial. The minister as he enters and as he quits his manse is hallowed by such presents; the faithful railway porter who has been for five years at his post is honoured in the same way. No man who has lived a blameless life for ten or for twenty years can well avoid the shadow of this persecution. But, for all that, it is not for the sake of Robert Louis Stevenson that I would put up this memorial; it is for our own sake. I do not, at any rate, wish to belong to a generation of which it

shall be said that they had this consummate being living and dying among them who did not recognise his splendour and his merit. I, at any rate, do not wish that some Burns shall hereafter come, as in the case of Ferguson, and with his own scanty means put up the memorial that Ferguson's own generation was unwilling to raise.

Oh, but it is said, Why not wait ten, or twenty, or thirty years until time shall have hallowed and mellowed his reputation! Ten or twenty, or thirty years! Who of us can afford to wait so long as that? How many of us in this hall will be alive in ten, or twenty, or thirty years? We cannot reckon on the morrow, and yet, forsooth, as a protection against our own sloth or our own parsimony, we are to relegate to a future generation, which shall then be the judge of the reputation of this great master—we are to leave it to a future generation to do what we are reluctant to do ourselves. I, at any rate, am not willing to take any such course. I am not willing that another day, or another week, or another month should pass over our heads without having taken some steps in the direction in which I am urging. What

form any such memorial should take I cannot for my part decide. Those who knew Stevenson himself would, I think, be entitled to have the first voice in the matter. There is one thing which no one has suggested, and that is an addition to our Edinburgh statues. It is a great thing that we should be able to walk about Edinburgh and see illustrious names on pedestals and something to commemorate them on these pedestals ; but I think you will agree with me, without any disrespect for some of the sculptors who have executed those statues, that if those restless spirits that possessed the Gadarene swine were to enter into the statues of Edinburgh, and if the whole stony and brazen troop were to hurry and hustle and huddle headlong down the steepest place near Edinburgh into the deepest part of the Firth of Forth, art would have sustained no serious loss. We might regret not a few of the effigies that we should have lost, but, on the whole, the city would not be the loser. I see, I think, a pained protest from the Lord Provost on my right. He is the custodian of our arts. It is not likely that the spirits of which I have spoken will carry out my proposal, and therefore

my opinion is a harmless one. But with regard to the memorial one point has struck me. There are two places in the world where Stevenson might fitly be commemorated ; one is Edinburgh and one is Samoa. I suppose that in Samoa some sort of memorial is sure to be raised. But, gathering as I do Stevenson's tastes only from a perusal of his works, there seem to me to have been two passions in his life—one for Scotland, and in Scotland for Edinburgh, and one for the sea. It seems to me that, if some memorial could be raised which should appeal to his passion both for Edinburgh and for the sea, we should have done the best thing in carrying out what might have been his wishes in such a connection. But whether that be so or not, of one thing I am certain—that none of us here, if I may judge from the crowding of this hall and the attitude of this audience, are willing that the time shall pass without some adequate memorial being raised. That is, after all, the materially important point for which we are met—that we should not do gown to posterity as a generation that was unaware of the treasure in our midst ; and I trust that before long it will be our happiness in Edinburgh to see

some memorial of Robert Louis Stevenson which shall add to the historical interest of our city, and to the many shrines of learning and of genius by which it is adorned.